DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 463 420 CE 083 007

AUTHOR	Peyton, Tony; Wheeler, Mary Gwen; Dalton, Debbie
TITLE	States Can Use Family Literacy Programs To Support Welfare Reform Goals. Issue Brief.
INSTITUTION	National Governors' Association, Washington, DC. Center for Best Practices.
SPONS AGENCY	Administration for Children and Families (DHHS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1998-06-04
NOTE	10p.; Largely excerpted from "Family Literacy Guide to Welfare Reform" (ED 419 089).
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.nga.org/cda/files/060498LITERACY.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; Educational Needs; Employment Programs; *Family Literacy; Family Needs; Federal Legislation; *Federal Programs; Intergenerational Programs; *Literacy Education; Outcomes of Education; Primary Education; State Federal Aid; State Regulation; *Welfare Recipients; *Welfare Reform; *Welfare Services
IDENTIFIERS	Welfare to Work Programs

ABSTRACT

Studies have shown an inextricable link between under-education and chronic, intergenerational welfare dependency. With welfare reform focusing on moving individuals into the workforce more quickly, state welfare reform efforts to assist low-income parents and their children are needed. Incorporating family literacy instruction into welfare-to-work programs is one of the strategies that states can use. Family literacy facilitates the transition from welfare to work, raises rates of adult employment and child school readiness, improves children's learning, and can help welfare recipients get and keep jobs. States can implement the following activities that tie family literacy to welfare-to-work programs: (1) define family literacy as an allowable activity under the state's work requirements; (2) have family literacy instructors serve as case mangers; (3) add family literacy programs to the post-employment support system; (5) use existing resources to support family literacy programs; (6) use block grant funds to encourage the provision of multiple services to serve the family unit; (7) designate family literacy programs as allowable sites for child care funds; (8) use Department of Labor Welfare-to-Work formula grants to serve families in family literacy programs; (9) use federal funds to strengthen the father figure's role in the family; and (10) create family literacy programs targeted to teen parents. An appendix provides information on the National Center for Family Literacy Funds Family Independence Initiative Demonstration Projects. (Contains 12 endnotes.) (KC)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 463 420

States Can Use Family Literacy Programs to Support Welfare Reform Goals

Issue Brief
June 4, 1998

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

J. McMaster

National Governors' Association
Center for Best Practices

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CE 083007

States Can Use Family Literacy Programs to Support Welfare Reform Goals

Employment and Social Services Policy Studies Division
Contacts: Evelyn Ganzglass, 202/624-5394
Rebecca Brown, 202/624-5367
June 4, 1998

Summary

Study after study reveals an inextricable link between undereducation and chronic, intergenerational welfare dependency. Parents who drop out of school and join the welfare rolls often have children who do the same, and the cycle of undereducation and poverty begins. With the recent dramatic changes to the welfare system, policymakers must consider ways to strengthen current approaches and implement new initiatives for addressing the needs of undereducated individuals in a welfare reform environment. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) focuses on moving individuals into the workplace as the first and most important step toward their achieving self-sufficiency. This is sometimes referred to as a "work first approach." PRWORA also emphasizes the need for state welfare reform efforts to assist low-income parents and their children in becoming self-sufficient. Incorporating family literacy instruction into their welfare-to-work programs is one of the strategies that states can use to help low-income families become self-sufficient.

Data show that people with strong basic education and literacy skills work and earn more than individuals with low skill levels. This information is particularly important to states as they implement the welfare-to-work provisions of the new law. The following statistics illustrate the connections among academic aptitude, earnings, and workforce participation.[1]

- Almost 50 percent of adult welfare recipients do not have a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate.
- More than 60 percent of the welfare recipients who spend more than five years on welfare enter the system with less than a high school education.
- Welfare recipients ages seventeen through twenty-one read, on average, at the sixth-grade level.
- Workers who lack a high school diploma earn a mean monthly income of $452, compared with $1,829 for those with a bachelor's degree.
- Adult welfare recipients with low literacy skills work eleven weeks per year, on average, while recipients with strong literacy skills work twenty-nine weeks per year, on average.

Family literacy programs that achieve results over more than one generation of a family help strengthen families and make adults, such as those characterized in the statistics above, more competitive in the job market. With welfare reform's shift from extensive preemployment training to work first, states can use family literacy to complement the education of working individuals with

low literacy levels. Family literacy can also help children become better prepared for school.

This *Issue Brief* examines some of the characteristics of existing family literacy programs and the benefits they offer to low-income families. It also explores how states can incorporate family literacy into their welfare-to-work efforts. The appendix provides information on the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) Family Independence Initiative demonstration projects. These projects reflect another approach to using family literacy to achieve the goals of welfare reform.

Family Literacy Facilitates the Transition from Welfare to Work

In less than a decade, the number of family literacy programs has increased from just a handful in two states to more than 3,000 nationwide. Each year, 60,000 families enroll in family literacy programs. Family literacy gained national prominence in 1988 when the Even Start Family Literacy Program was authorized as part of Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act. The federal Even Start Family Literacy Program aims to break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by integrating early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program.

The level of parental involvement in the child's school and the level of parents' literacy are key factors influencing a child's ultimate success in school. More and more federal initiatives have recognized the importance of this link between parent and child by incorporating family literacy into their provisions. Head Start and Title I encourage parental involvement, and family literacy has played an increasingly important role in these programs. In 1994 family literacy services were added to the reauthorization of Head Start. Moreover, new regulations for Title I allow these funds to be used for family literacy services to any child in school, regardless of age, and stress the role of the parent in the child's education.

In comprehensive family literacy programs, families attend school together. While their children learn in nearby classrooms, parents pursue their own educational goals and form a peer support group. During the day, parents and children can also work and play together. This enhances the value of education for both parents and child, helps pave the way for the child's success, and reinforces the parents' role as their child's first and most important teachers.

Family literacy provides intensive, frequent, and long-term education and family support services to parents and their children. Comprehensive programs include four integrated components that uniquely serve families:

- adult education or job skills training for parents or caregivers;
- literacy-focused early childhood education;
- regular parent and child "together time"; and
- a parent group that provides life-skills education, peer support, and resources for effective parenting.

Integrating these components is critical because the combined activities help parents transfer skills from their families to the workplace and their communities. Since 1991, 73 percent of the families in NCFL-funded programs or NCFL partnering programs completed the program, left to enroll in another education or training program, or got a job.

Requirements of the new welfare reform law, which emphasize a work first approach complemented with skills training and education instead of extensive preemployment training, suggest a significant role for family literacy instruction in helping welfare recipients obtain and maintain employment.

States must meet certain work participation rate requirements and must place a time limit of no more than sixty months (not necessarily consecutive) on the receipt of cash assistance by eligible families. Welfare recipients must participate in a work activity, as defined by the state, within twenty-four months of receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). These mandates emphasize the need for poor families, particularly those recipients with significant barriers to employment, to strengthen their skills and literacy levels so they are better prepared for the workplace, more likely to retain their jobs, and better situated to achieve self-sufficiency.

Family Literacy Raises Rates of Adult Employment and Child School Readiness

Research conducted by NCFL indicates that family literacy initiates these skill-level changes and improves lives.

- Three times as many adults obtain and keep a job after completing a family literacy program, compared with those not completing a family literacy program.[2]
- Participation in a family literacy program reduces an individual's dependence on public assistance by 50 percent and significantly increases employment levels.[3]
- Participation in a family literacy program increases an adult's math, reading, and language scores, improving his or her competitiveness in the job market.[4]
- Families participating in a family literacy program stay enrolled in the program longer and have higher attendance rates, compared with those participating in most adult-focused programs.[5]
- Adults in family literacy programs gain self-esteem and self-confidence and take control of their lives.[6]
- After participating in a family literacy program, the family's literacy activity in the home increases and the children are better prepared to start school.[7]

Family Literacy Improves Children's Learning

Adults are not the only ones who benefit from family literacy programs; research has shown that children also benefit from participation. Instead of falling further and further behind, children who attend family literacy programs are ready to start school and are better able to stay ahead in class.

- An NCFL study revealed that almost 80 percent of children who participated in family literacy programs rated above their class average on seven factors— academic performance, motivation to learn, family support, relationships with others, class behavior, concept of self, and probable success.[8]
- A study in Rochester, New York, reported that 88 percent of the children involved in family literacy programs tested above their grade level on standardized tests.[9]
- Other research has shown that children's reading of books and magazines increased by 80 percent to more than once a day for those who attended family literacy programs.[10] Children participating in these programs also have higher school attendance rates than those not participating.[11]

Family Literacy Can Help Welfare Recipients Get and Keep Jobs

As more recipients leave welfare for work, state caseloads will increasingly reflect higher proportions of the educationally disadvantaged. For this reason, states may want to adopt program designs that take advantage of existing educational opportunities, such as family literacy. States can use family literacy programs to provide literacy education to parents and children, while parents

participate in work-focused activities required to receive cash assistance.

Family literacy expands work and training opportunities by combining education and work. For example, adult education instruction within family literacy programs is based on the learner's needs, goals, and employability plans, all of which can be coordinated with his or her caseworker. Students set career goals, receive prevocational training, and, in some cases, get specific job training. Job training often occurs in coordination with local businesses and aims to reinforce an adult's roles of worker, parent, and citizen.

There are many options for using family literacy to support families in their transition from welfare to work. States may want to consider implementing the following activities that tie family literacy to their welfare-to-work programs.

Incorporate Family Literacy Programs into the State's Welfare-to-Work Strategy

Many family literacy programs combine family literacy training with community service assignments or work experience programs because these activities prepare welfare recipients to take the next step to unsubsidized employment and get their children off to a good start. States might consider using this approach to serve welfare recipients with young children, individuals exempt from the time limits, or recipients who have some time remaining before they are required to find work. Schools are natural environments to combine work experience with family literacy training. They encourage parents to get more involved in their children's learning and school activities. The school setting is also a good first work experience for a parent on welfare because it often is a nonthreatening environment. The following initiatives combine family literacy with work experience.

- Under state welfare law, Ohio allows a county to contract with a school to enable a work experience program participant with an enrolled child to volunteer or work for compensation at the child's school. A contract may also provide the school with funds to pay for coordinating, training, and supervising participants who volunteer or work for pay in schools. These positions require participants to attend classes that provide instruction for parents in creating a home environment that prepares and enables children to learn at school. Schools provide a variety of job opportunities, and the onsite work experience facilitates parental involvement. For example, a family literacy program in Canton, Ohio, combines ten hours of work-focused basic skills training with twenty hours of work experience within the school. Some of the participant's work hours are spent in the child's classroom, where he or she learns how to support the child's development. Job shadowing, mentors, and career assessments are integrated into the program.

- The Jefferson County Public School System Family Education Program in Louisville, Kentucky, designed the Apprentice Transition: From Welfare to Work family literacy program. This program offers TANF recipients increased levels of job shadowing and work experience in school district jobs. Participating parents work as teachers' aides, bus monitors, maintenance workers, office assistants, or food service helpers. Family Education Program staff help apprentices devise individual transition plans based on career choices and TANF requirements. As apprentices reach specified benchmarks of preemployment skills, they incorporate more job-preparation activities into their weekly program activities. This program is premised on the belief that leaving welfare is a process, not a single event.

Define Family Literacy as an Allowable Activity under the State's Work Requirements

The federal welfare reform law strictly limits the activities considered as "work" for the purpose of

states meeting TANF work participation rate requirements. These activities include subsidized or unsubsidized employment; on-the-job training; work experience; community service; up to twelve months of vocational education training; six weeks of job search per year; the provision of child care to other welfare recipients; and, for teen parents only, high school or GED preparation. For nonteens without a high school diploma or GED certificate, after twenty hours of participation in the above activities (thirty hours for two-parent families), a state may count participation in education that either directly relates to employment or to the pursuit of a high school diploma or GED certificate. In some cases, participation in family literacy programs that include these goals may count toward the work participation rate.

Although the activities that fulfill the federal work participation rate requirements are prescribed in federal law, states may define a different set of allowable work activities for the work requirement that the state imposes on individuals as a condition of receipt of assistance. In addition, states may use TANF funds for a broader array of activities, including promoting job preparation and work, so long as these activities are consistent with the purposes of the law. States may want to combine family literacy with activities that meet the federal work participation rate requirements, such as vocational education training or on-the-job training.

- In Rochester, New York, welfare recipients can attend a family literacy program in the morning and a vocational education class in the afternoon. Following completion of the short-term vocational education training, participants are placed in internships in their field of study with the goal of obtaining permanent employment in the industry.

- The Families First program in Tennessee contracts with several organizations that provide family literacy instruction. For example, the Nashville READ program collaborates with Head Start and senior citizen centers to offer family literacy education and promote intergenerational literacy learning. The state allows participation in family literacy programs to count as adult basic education, an activity satisfying twenty hours of its forty-hour work requirement.

Have Family Literacy Instructors Serve as Case Managers

In a Rochester, New York, family literacy program, the family literacy coordinator acts as the student's case manager in conjunction with the department of social services' case manager. In this capacity, the coordinator provides followup services for the adults until ninety days after a job placement. Because the first several months on the job are crucial to the participant's job retention, this ongoing followup is important in helping the recipient become self-sufficient.

Add Family Literacy Programs to the Postemployment Support System

In Eau Claire, Wisconsin, a family literacy program offers a variety of services that aim to extend learning once students get jobs. These services include a "family night," with classes for parents and children; book events at the workplace for employees; and individual tutoring.

Use Existing Resources to Support Family Literacy Programs under Welfare Reform

Family literacy programs have experience in combining and leveraging resources, such as Head Start, Title I, preschool and child care, school-to-career, adult basic education, community college, TANF, and housing funds, to provide adult work experience, job skills training, and educational skills for parents and children. States can use these existing funds to create family literacy pilot programs for welfare recipients.

- In Kentucky the department for adult education and literacy committed $300,000 in fiscal 1997– 98 for family literacy pilot projects targeting Kentucky Transitional Assistance Program families.
- In Missouri welfare recipients enroll in family literacy programs primarily through the department of elementary and secondary education's Even Start family literacy sites. Both parent and child receive literacy intervention services at the same facility.
- In recent years, South Carolina has developed family literacy programs by providing up to $15,000 each to ten rural projects. The sites build on the previous work of the state's fifteen Head Start programs in family literacy. In 1996 state and local agencies developed a two-pronged collaboration. The state team, including representatives from the department of education (adult education), the state Head Start Collaboration project, and the department of social services, works on designing programs, combining funding, and issuing requests for proposals. Local programs use family literacy as a strategy to help Head Start families that receive public assistance.

Consider Using TANF Funds to Encourage the Provision of Multiple Services to Serve the Family Unit

In 1997 Virginia allocated $650,000 of its TANF block grant to initiate collaboration among the commonwealth's adult education, at-risk, and social services programs. The Virginia Initiatives Early Childhood program is administered by the department of education. It will fund approximately thirty early childhood, adult education, or community colleges through a competitive request-for-proposal process. Applicants must explain how they will integrate early childhood education, adult education or job skills training, and parenting support. In the family literacy program, families come to school together. While their children learn in nearby classrooms, parents pursue their own educational goals, which, under the Virginia program, include specific job training. Programs also provide time for parents and children to learn together.[12]

Designate Family Literacy Programs as Allowable Sites for Child Care Funds

In Eau Claire, Wisconsin, a family literacy program's preschool component is supported with child care funds that are attached to Wisconsin Works (W-2) clients participating in family literacy programs.

Consider Using Some of the Department of Labor Welfare-to-Work Formula Grant to Serve Families in Family Literacy Programs

Family literacy programs serve adults who would qualify to receive Welfare-to-Work (WtW) formula grant services. Therefore, if a state intends to use 15 percent of its grant to provide services to WtW participants, then it could fund family literacy programs that provide one or more of the following activities: community service programs; job-readiness activities; postemployment services, including basic educational skills training; case management; and job retention and support services, including child care. All of these are allowable activities under the WtW interim final regulations.

Use TANF and WtW Funds to Focus on Strengthening the Father's Role in the Family

Involving fathers in reading to their children and supporting their education is an effective means of engaging absent parents. North Carolina is considering using TANF funds for family literacy programs that seek to strengthen the father's role in the family and get him more involved in his

children's lives.

Create Family Literacy Programs Targeted to Teen Parents

Because teens are deemed involved in a work activity so long as they are working toward a high school equivalency diploma, they can be served in family literacy programs. Family literacy programs can give them the education they need and can also strengthen the family unit through life-skills and parenting training. In a Fort Wayne, Indiana, family literacy program, the emphasis is strictly on serving teen parents.

Conclusion

To achieve the goals of welfare reform, states should consider serving the family unit, not just the adults individually. The children must be involved to reduce the risk of having another generation dependent on public assistance. The time parents spend with their children in family literacy programs also develops the next generation's self-sufficiency skills.

Family literacy is a welfare-to-work strategy that enables states to focus on strengthening the family unit while helping the entire family become economically stable. In an era of work first-focused welfare reform, it can complement the education of working individuals with low literacy levels. The family literacy feature of combining parent and child learning also helps children become better prepared for school and reduces their likelihood of future dependency on public assistance. The effectiveness of several strategies discussed in this *Issue Brief* is not yet known because they are relatively new. However, the approaches merit further exploration as states strive to help welfare recipients become and remain successfully employed.

Family literacy programs provide participants with the self-confidence, peer support, and family-management skills that lead to employment and job retention. They provide adults with the skills they need in the workforce and their children with the tools they need to succeed in school. In addition, parents learn how to help their children in school, and their children reap benefits that last longer than the program. Family literacy is a welfare-to-work strategy that states may want to use to strengthen families, promote self-sufficiency, and otherwise implement welfare reform.

Appendix: National Center for Family Literacy Funds Family Independence Initiative Demonstration Projects

The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) provides families with the skills they need to become self-sufficient. It recently received a $2.25 million grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to develop a comprehensive Family Independence Initiative designed to demonstrate family literacy's effectiveness in moving families from the welfare rolls to the workplace. Under this initiative, NCFL will develop, implement, and evaluate pilot program sites and create a welfare-to-work model. The goals of the initiative include creating new connections and partnerships with vocational programs and businesses; continually improving family literacy curricula; developing training and implementation strategies to assist in program operation; building a body of literature of use to program developers; and informing welfare policymakers so they make decisions that strengthen, rather than fragment, families. The initiative will eventually cover ten to fifteen sites throughout the nation to incorporate current knowledge and tailor the programs to meet the goals of welfare reform.

The deadline for submitting a demonstration site proposal was April 29. However, if you are interested in being a part of the process, NCFL can put you in touch with the collaboration partners

in your city and state. Proposals were accepted from the following John S. and James L. Knight Foundation network cities: Contra Costa, California; Long Beach, California; San Jose, California; Boulder, Colorado; Boca Raton, Florida; Bradenton, Florida; Miami, Florida; Tallahassee, Florida; Columbus, Georgia; Macon, Georgia; Milledgeville, Georgia; Fort Wayne, Indiana; Gary, Indiana; Wichita, Kansas; Lexington, Kentucky; Detroit, Michigan; Duluth, Minnesota; St. Paul, Minnesota; Biloxi, Mississippi; Charlotte, North Carolina; Grand Forks, North Dakota; Akron, Ohio; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; State College, Pennsylvania; Columbia, South Carolina; Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; and Aberdeen, South Dakota. Any questions regarding the program should be directed to Debbie Nichols of NCFL at 502/584-1133 or dnichols@famlit.org.

Endnotes

1. National Institute for Literacy, "Fact Sheets" (Washington, D.C.: National Institute for Literacy, 1996).
2. National Center for Family Literacy, *The Power of Family Literacy* (Louisville, Ky.: National Center for Family Literacy, 1996).
3. National Center for Family Literacy, "Facts and Figures" (Louisville, Ky.: National Center for Family Literacy, 1997).
4. National Center for Family Literacy, *The Power of Family Literacy.*
5. Ibid.
6. National Center for Family Literacy, "Facts and Figures."
7. National Center for Family Literacy, *The Power of Family Literacy.*
8. Ibid.
9. National Center for Family Literacy, *The Power of Family Literacy.*
10. L. Mikulecky, P. Lloyd, and D. Brannon, *Evaluating Parent/Child Interactions* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University, 1994).
11. National Center for Family Literacy, *The Power of Family Literacy.*
12. "Virginia Adopts Family Literacy," *The Public Innovator* (August 28, 1997).

This *Issue Brief* was prepared by Tony Peyton, a policy specialist for the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL); Mary Gwen Wheeler, a program specialist for NCFL; and Debbie Dalton, director of external relations for NCFL. It was written for the National Governors' Association Center for Best Practices and supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

Much of the information included in the *Issue Brief* is excerpted from NCFL's new publication, *Family Literacy Guide to Welfare Reform*, which is available through NCFL. The National Center for Family Literacy, based in Louisville, Kentucky, is a nonprofit organization that provides advocacy, research, and training for thousands of family literacy programs throughout the United States. For more information, write the National Center for Family Literacy at 325 West Main Street, Suite 200, Louisville, Kentucky; call NCFL at 502/584-1133; or visit its web site at http://www.famlit.org.